

VOLUNTEERING IN DHARAMSALA

TIBET CHARITY



Tibet Charity was founded by [Venerable Lakha Rinpoche](#) in 1998 in Denmark with the help of a group of dedicated supporters. The aim was to help poor and needy Tibetans in India and Nepal. The Charity grew rapidly as more people joined the cause.

In 2000, a branch opened in Sweden with its own board members and office. As the Charity expanded, it found itself in a position to widen its scope of community service. At that point, the decision was made to open an office in India. It was felt that this was needed to bridge the gap between the sponsors and the beneficiaries, and to garner information about local need. A Tibet Charity branch was also established in Phendeling, Nepal in



Director, Tsering Thundup (left), Lakha Rinpoche (right)

2000 (<http://tibetcharity.org>) after Lakha Rinpoche and his wife Pia observed that there were a lot of school dropouts in the area.

The new building in Dharamsala was inaugurated in September 2004, and the Charity started its work in January 2005. In 2006, a veterinary clinic was started to help animals, especially the stray dogs of the region. Today, we work in close cooperation with many other NGOs and individuals around the world to provide maximum benefit to the public. We also work closely with the various Departments of Central Tibetan Administration while dealing at

the same time with individuals and Societies in various Tibetan Settlements and schools.

We are located in Dharamsala, which is in the north-Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Tibet Charity comprises of the education section that provides English and computer education. Most of the students at Tibet Charity are young Tibetan adults who have come from Tibet. When the Tibetans come from Tibet, they don't know any English or Hindi, the predominant language of India. Most of them don't have any formal education, and it's institutions like ours that equips them with the necessary language skills to survive in India. It is very encouraging to see our students gain a certain proficiency in English in just a few years of study. We are greatly indebted to the our volunteers who give their time and energy in educating our students, and we and our students owe a lot to all numerous volunteers who have come here and taught.

THE SCHOOL

At the Tibet Charity Education Centre, we provide English and computer education. Most of our students are young adults most of whom have not had any formal education. When they come to India, most make an illegal hazardous journey through snowy mountain passes trekking for over a month to Nepal risking life and limb. They face additional personal dangers from Nepalese soldiers, and sadly, there have been cases where young girls and women have been sexually violated. Jobs are scarce in Dharamsala, and when available, a months' wage in a restaurant is a low 3500 rupees or so. Most of our students are supported financially by their parents and relatives in Tibet, India or the west. Most of our students hope to find a way out of India to the west, and many are successful in the quest.



The school equips the students primarily with English language skills in conjunction with computer literacy. We use the New English File books. Each class is 2 hours long. When there are teachers available, we also arrange a one hour 'Conversation Class' usually between 4-5

p.m., and our volunteer teachers and tourists spend an hour talking to our students in small groups. When teachers are available, our teachers tutor students either individually or in groups. We have whiteboards in all the three classrooms used to teach English. Our spacious computer class is equipped with 9 computers. We provide white board markers and other essentials, and we don't expect our teachers to spend a single rupee on their classes. We have a spacious room with an overhead projector which is used as a classroom, a movie theatre, and a dining hall. The projector is connected to the internet, and it can be used for teaching purposes.

The school year is divided into 2 Semesters, and there is a three month winter break from December 15 – March 15. The winter break allows the students to visit relatives and take a break from school. The 1st Semester is from March 15 - July 31 with a week long break in the first week of June. The 2nd Semester is from August 1 – December 15 with a week's break in the first week of October.

Tibet Charity has a veterinary section, a health section, and provides scholarships to deserving Tibetan college students and financial assistance to retired elderly Tibetans. The veterinary section is located in a separate location, and we occasionally have volunteer vets and para-vets. The health section is located at the main building, and has 2 nurses and 4 home nurses. The home nurses visit the homes of the elderly and dispense medicines, check blood pressures, and do chores when needed. Dr. Gunver Jule, a practicing Danish doctor, is the head of the Tibet Charity office in Denmark. She does her work pro bono, and visits Dharamsala and Nepal a couple times a year.

The Political situation of Tibet

The Tibet Autonomous Region is considered a minority autonomous region. Tibet has been a part of China since 1951. The eastern parts of Tibet (Chinese: Xizang, pronounced Shizang) were invaded by the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China. After a brief skirmish between Tibetan and Chinese soldiers, the Tibetans surrendered after a few days of fighting. A Tibetan delegation was sent to Beijing to negotiate, but Tibet's complete capitulation to China materialized after the signing of the Fourteen Point Agreement. The Tibetan delegates were coerced to sign the agreement which stated that Tibet was an integral part of China. The Dalai Lama continued to live in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, till 1959, where the Chinese had full control. He fled Tibet on March 13, and a battle between the Tibetans and the Chinese ensued in its wake. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have died at the hands of Communist soldiers since

1949; hundreds of thousands starved to death in the Great Leap Forward campaign when the wheat crop failed, which was grown in place of the traditional barley crop, on the high Tibetan land that is on average over 4,900 meters (16,000 ft) above sea level.

Today, the vast majority of the 6 million Tibetans still live in Tibet. The Planning Commission of the Tibetan Government in Exile's 2009 census on 12 April 2009 stood at 127,935, comprising of 70,556 males and 57,379 females. Taking into consideration of people who didn't take part in the survey, it is estimated that there are around 150,000 Tibetans in exile altogether. China has built a railway line from Chengdu to Lhasa, and numerous roads, and is building a network of roads and railway tracks in Tibet. Human Rights, including religious freedom, are frequently violated in Tibet as elsewhere in China.

WHERE IS DHARAMSALA?



The scenic town of Dharamsala sits in the foothills of the Himalayas, and it is located in the north-Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. It is a 12-hour bus ride or a one-hour flight north of Delhi. Many know it as the place where His Holiness the XIV Dalai lama of Tibet lives. In 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, recommended Dharamsala as a home for the

Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans. In 1959, Dharamsala was a thinly populated backwoods. The Tibetans, now, make a sizable portion of the population. Thousands of tourists come here every year, drawn by its beauty, affordability, cosmopolitanism, spiritualism, size, isolation, friendliness, slow pace, among other things. It is an antidote to our helter-skelter modern life; it is a good place for rejuvenation. Its appeal lies in its affordability, cosmopolitanism, isolation, spiritualism, beauty, uniqueness, and smallness, among other things.

The Central Tibetan Administration (aka the Tibetan Government in Exile) (www.tibet.net) is here, where several hundred Tibetans work. The Tibetan Library of Works and Archives is here where many come to study and do research. The main Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) school and the lower TCV school where close to 2000 students study are here. Since Dharamsala is the center of the Tibetan diaspora, the HQs of numerous political non-governmental organizations are here, such as: The Tibetan Women's Association (TWA), the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), the Democratic Party of Tibet (DTP), etc.

Dharamsala is divided into lower-Dharamsala, which has a predominantly Indian population, and upper-Dharamsala (aka Mcleodganj), where a lot of Tibetans live. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's residence is in Mcleodganj, and so is the main temple of the local Tibetans, the Tsuglakhang.. There are many Tibetan shops, hotels, and restaurants in Mcleodganj. There are also a lot of Indians who live side by side with the Tibetans in Mcleodganj. There are an equal if not more number of Indian hotels, shops, and restaurants in Mcleod. Mcleodganj is a small place, with a small number of shops and restaurants. There are under a hundred shops and restaurants in the whole of Mcleod. There is a small expat community here too.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO HERE

(A). Study Tibetan language or Buddhism

Tibetan language is taught at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives, and it is open to tourists. If you are serious about studying Tibetan, then you should go to Sarah College of Higher Studies. A few Thai, Vietnamese, and Koreans are now proficient in Tibetan after a few years of study there.

(B). Meditation and Yoga

There are many meditation centres in town, such as the Tushita, and the Vipasana centre. During the warm tourist season, there are many yoga places in Mcleodganj. Many individual yoga teachers can also be found, who

advertise their business on the door of their hotel rooms and with banners outside their hotels.

(C). Hiking and Camping



Dharamsala is a hikers' paradise. Since it is in the foothills of the Himalayas, there are numerous hiking destinations, and the most popular one is Triund. Triund is on the top of a mountain, and it takes between 3-4 hours to get there from McLeodganj. Overnight stay in Triund is possible at the gu

est houses up there; it is also a good play to go camping. You can see Triund from McLeod Ganj. Triund is approximately 800 mtrs higher than McLeod Ganj. To get to Triund, you hike to Dharamkot (20 min), from there you go to Gallu Temple (20 min), and from there you start on the trail that will take you straight to Triund (3 hrs). The view from the trail is breathtaking, and you get a bird's eye view of Dharamsala. There is a guest house in Triund run by the local Himachal tourism office where you may stay overnight. Rooms have to be booked in advance. When the weather is nice, camping outside is an option, and numerous shops in McLeod Ganj rent camping gear.

(D). Volunteer at TWA, DPT, TYC

If you want to do more serious volunteer work, you should consider volunteering at the Tibetan Women's Association, the Tibetan Youth Congress, the Democratic Party of Tibet, provided you have the qualifications and skills they require. The volunteer work might involve doing research, or editing, etc. These NGOs publish a lot of literature, so they might need help in the process.

ARRIVAL IN INDIA

Most people coming to Dharamsala fly into the New Delhi Indira Gandhi International Airport. If you don't want to spend a night in Delhi, you can fly or catch a bus to Dharamsala the same day you land in Delhi. Flight tickets should be bought in advance from your country. Bus tickets can be procured either at the bus station at the Kashmiri Gate (name of place) bus station. The ticket office is open only for a short duration in a day, and the omnipresent chaos at the bus station, both make it a poor choice to get you bus tickets there. You are free to try your luck there first. As an alternative, bus tickets can be more easily procured at the Majnu-ka-tilla, which is only around 3 kms from the bus station at Kashmiri Gate. Majnu-ka-tilla is a bit of an eyesore, and it is where the Tibetan colony is situated in Delhi. Five busses leave for Dharamsala at 6:30 pm every evening, and it a good place to get a bus seat to Delhi. Bus tickets are best booked in advance since all the busses leave fully occupied on most days.

SHORT STAY IN DELHI ?

Despite the notoriety Delhi gained as a result of the Commonwealth Games, Delhi is a friendlier city now. There is now an extensive Metro system, which is used by hundreds of thousands of people everyday, and it has cut down traffic on the roads, sizably. The three-wheeled auto-rickshaws, some heavier vehicles and even some busses, run on compressed natural gas. As a result, choking exhaust fumes are a thing of the past, although there is still a lot of traffic. There are a lot of things that you can see in Delhi: the historic Red Fort that was built by Shah Jahan, the same Mughal emperor who built the Taj Mahal in Agra; the National Museum that houses thousands of artifacts which is located in walking distance to the India Gate; Cannaught Place, which is a shopping area that is arranged in concentric circles and is a good place to just get out. The Metro is best avoided during the morning and the evening rush-hour, other wise traveling on it is cheap, safe and reliable. Delhi has shopping malls that rival ones found in the west. Most can be accessed through the metro. If you want to do some shopping, malls are where you want to go.

In Delhi, you can stay at Majnu Ka Tilla, a Tibetan colony on the outskirts of the city.

(1). MAJNU KA TILLA –

India's sterling economy hasn't lifted the boats of the majority of its people. Delhi is very much still a work in progress. Majnukatilla affords a safe and affordable stay in Delhi where hotels can be very expensive. But Majnukatilla

is far from being perfect. Around a thousand Tibetans can be found there at any time, and the vast majority of the buildings there are hotels catering to traveling Tibetans. It is less than a square kilometer; buildings are built only a few feet apart; the main thoroughfare is only several feet across and only a 100 ft long, and is used by pedestrians and the occasional rickshaw carrying the luggage of a traveler going to a hotel. Narrow unkempt alleys, some of which have overflowing drainage water, crisscross this tiny commercial Tibetan area. If you want to stay here, at the Airport taxi office, you can get a taxi to Majnukatilla for around 400 rupees. It is half hour drive to Majnukatilla.

Despite all the glaring shortcomings, Majnukatilla has a few hotels that meet the standards of western travelers. It is the only other place you can a bus ticket to Dharamsala; the other being the main bus station in Kashmiri Gate. Below are the best two hotels, and they will pick you up at the airport. Call ahead to book a room.

a. AMA Rabsel House, Tel: +91-11-23812284, 23816977, Fax: 011-23811589, Email- ban-zai@live.com

b. Wongden House *phone* : (+91 011) 23816689 / 23812896 / 23815961
Email- wongdhenhouse@hotmail.com

(2). FIND A HOTEL IN DELHI on your own

There are a lot of resources on the internet to find a hotel in Delhi, and if you are put off by Majnukatilla, you can stay elsewhere in Delhi. Indiamike.com is a very useful website for such things, and has unbiased reviews of hotels, etc. We encourage you to spend some time doing research about hotels in Delhi, and find a good hotel, and not be a victim of fraud, etc.

If you want to do some sightseeing in Delhi, finding a hotel in Delhi shouldn't be really all that difficult. You can put off staying in Delhi to when you finally leave Dharamsala.

GETTING TO DHARAMSALA FROM DELHI

(A). TRAINS FROM DELHI TO PHATANKOT/CHAKKI BANK !

For some, traveling by train is preferable over traveling by bus. The overnight bus ride is recommended for seasoned travelers who have

endured the trials and tribulations of traveling in Asia. The train ride is much more comfortable, and you can get a 'sleeper' so that you can catch a little sleep while the train pulls you towards Phatankot and Chakki Bank! Some trains go as far as Chakki Bank only, which is a couple of kilometers from Phatankot. Trains don't go all the way to Dharamsala, but stop at Phatankot, a crowded, nondescript, dusty and grimy city. Luckily you don't have to stay in Phatankot, and you can catch a bus to Dharamsala. The bus ride is 4 hours. Alternatively, you can get a taxi, which will cost more but will take less time and be more comfortable.

There are a number of trains from Delhi to Phatankot and Chakki Bank.

Please check www.eraill.in for train schedules.

TRAIN BOOKING OFFICES IN DELHI

There are two tourist booking offices in Delhi providing a very convenient and easy way to buy a ticket for any train in India.

1 - International Tourist Bureau at the New Delhi railway station

(7.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8-2pm Sun).

On the first floor at the station is an office for foreigners only, so no queuing up! They all speak English. If a train seems full, make sure to ask for the "tourist quota". This way you often will be able to get a ticket even for a train leaving on the same night.

2 - Railway Booking Office – Arrival Hall, Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi

It is only open from 8am to 8pm.

You can pay two ways (you need your passport and a valid visa for both):

- with \$US or Sterling (you get change back in Indian rupees)
- with Indian Rupees

Types of Seats available:

- (1). 2nd Class Sleeper :Provides: Wooden seat to sit/sleep on, no sheets, pillows or blankets. Bring your sleeping bag and keep an eye on your bags.
- (2). 2 Tier Air Conditioned Carriage :Provides: Bed/seat with clean sheet, pillow and blanket given out after the train departs. Generally for middle class Indians and foreigners so it's a bit safer from thieves and the carriage doors are locked at night so people don't wander in.

THE FINAL LEG TO MCLEOD AFTER THE TRAIN – 2 CHOICES

1. By Bus: When you reach Pathankot/Chakki Bank, you can catch a local bus from the bus station (you'll need to get a short inexpensive autorickshaw from Chakki Bank Railway Station to the bus station). The bus normally goes to lower Dharamsala . Some buses take you all the way up to McLeod Ganj, but even these stop in lower Dharamsala for at least half an hour.

2. By Taxi: When you reach Pathankot/Chakki Bank, you can catch a taxi from either railway station all the way to Mcleodganj. The journey by taxi takes about two and a half hours.

Getting to Mcleodganj from lower-Dharamsala

Mcleodgang is also called upper-Dharamsala, and it is where Tibet Charity is located. It is only a 30-minute bus ride away from lower-Dharamsala; taxis take 10 minutes. Generally, you needn't worry about this since busses from Delhi will drop you off in Mcleodganj. In case you find yourself in lower-Dharamsala, you can catch a bus for 10 rupees or a private taxi for around 150 rupees to Mcleodganj.

(B). DIRECT BUSES FROM DELHI TO MCLEOD GANJ

There are night buses from Delhi to Mcleodgang(upper-Dharamsala). The travel agents in Majnu Ka Tilla, will be able to arrange these for you. They are called "delux" buses. A bus ticket is 550 rupees; the busses are quite old; the seats are well worn, relatively comfortable, and quite cramped. The busses are not very clean and comfortable according to western standards, but according to Indian standards, they are good.

(C). BY AIR FROM DELHI

The nearest airport to McLeod Ganj is the Gaggal airport, 15 km south of Dharamsala.

Planes tickets should be booked in advance from your country. The cost of a plane ticket to Dharamsala from Delhi, procured on short notice in Delhi, can be quite expensive. The trip takes less than an hour.

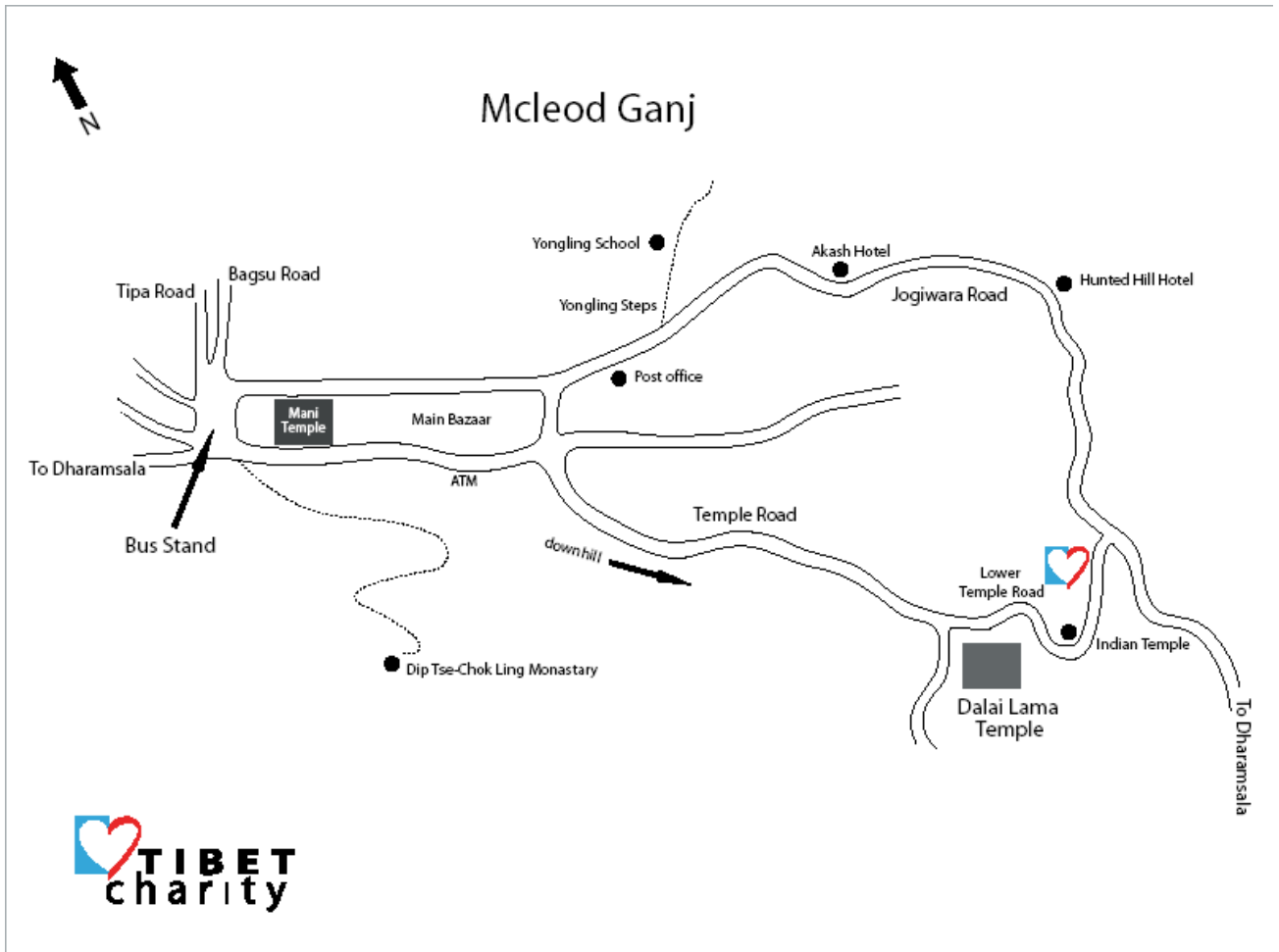
IN DHARAMSALA

(A). Upon Arrival in Dharamsala

The school opens at 9 am Monday to Friday. It is not open at the weekend. If you arrive in the middle of the night for some reason, then for your own convenience, you may find a hotel near the small main square where the bus drops you. There are hotels within a hundred meters down Bagsu Road, like the Green Hotel. Hotels shouldn't cost more than 500 rupees a night during the tourist season.

(B). Location of the School

Tibet Charity is located on lower Temple Road. It is located 200 meters beyond and below the main Temple or the Tsuglakhang.



(C). Water

Generally, the tap water should be okay. The water in Dharamsala is the melt water of snow on the mountains. Most hotels have water storage tanks on roof tops, and if the tanks are clean, then there shouldn't be a problem drinking the water. Sometimes, the water may be stored in underground storage tanks first and then pumped to the tanks on the rooftops. Please boil your water!

(D). Food

Food in restaurants should be okay. Tourists generally develop an upset stomach after they come to Dharamsala. We serve our teachers a simple vegetarian lunch at 1 p.m. We also serve tea at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. We also have a special dinner for the volunteers once a month.

(E). Medical Facilities

There is a health clinic at the center. If you want to take Tibetan medicine, you can go to the Tibetan Medical Institute, aka the Mentse Khang. The Tibetan Delek Hospital is the biggest hospital in Mcleodganj. They have western doctors sometimes.

There are many private hospitals in Delhi that provide very good and very affordable health care, such as the Apollo Hospitals. www.apollohospitals.com/. There are several pharmacies in Dharamsala that have a good selection of medicines.

(F). Climate and Terrain

Dharamsala is at an altitude of 1700m, which is not very high. March, April and May are warm. June is quite hot. From July –September, it is the Monsoon season, and it rains quite a lot. The weather is generally warm in the Monsoon.

Dharamsala receives a lot of rainfall in the monsoon. It is very wet and humid; good quality umbrellas are readily available here. The Winter months of December, January, and February are very cold. Most of the tourist have gone, and shops close around 7 p.m. in the evening. In a lot of places, there aren't proper roads. In the monsoon, unpaved byroads become extremely muddy, so a good pair of walking shoes is recommended.

(G). Transport in Town

Most people get around town on foot, taxi, or auto-rickshaw, but you could buy a motorbike. A good second-hand motorcycle can be had for under 30,000 rupees. You will need a Universal Motorcycle License to ride in India. You can also ride the bus, which is a cheaper option.

(H). Restaurants

There are mainly two types of restaurants in town: Tibetan and Indian. Here are some examples of popular Tibetan foods: momos (dumplings), gyathuk (noodle soup), phing-sha (bean noodle/ meat soup), tingmo (steam bread). The following are the names of some good restaurants.

1. Hotel Tibet (on Bagsu Road): Hotel Tibet is one of the oldest restaurants and hotels in town. It probably has one of the best Tibetan food in town, and it also has very good Indian food. There is a separate bar; there are two floors of restaurants.
2. Kailash Tibetan Restaurant close to the main square on Temple Road): Kailash restaurant is also one of the oldest restaurants in town. Kailash

also has good food. They have a covered rooftop floor. Their spring rolls are popular.

3. Some other good Tibetan restaurants are: Tibet Kitchen (near main square).
4. Pema Thang has good vegetarian food and it is popular with tourists. They also have a hotel.
5. Chonor House (near the main temple) is owned and run by the Norbulinka Institute. Their room rates are a little steep, but their food isn't very expensive, and they have a pleasant outdoor terrace.
6. One Two Café coffee shop (near the Main Temple gate) is popular. They have excellent coffees and snacks. They have free wi-fi Internet access for patrons.
7. Hotel McLeod is a very popular Indian restaurant. Tourists go there to get some food in the evenings and drink some beer.
8. Hotel Asian Plaza in the main square has a nice terrace restaurant on the roof. Food isn't that great but it has good views.
9. Jimmy's Italian (near the main square on Jogiwara road), Nick's Italian (Bagsu Road), and Carpe Diem (on Jogiwara road) are popular with tourists.
10. Green Hotel (on Bhagsu Road) serves very good vegetarian food only, and it is popular with tourists. They are also a hotel.
11. Family Pizzeria in Dharamkot is popular for pizzas. It is about 30 minutes walk from McLeod Ganj. You may take a taxi up to Dharamkot, and walk the remaining distance.
12. Lungta Japanese restaurant is also very popular with tourists who like the cheap and good Japanese food. There are of course many other good restaurants that have gone unmentioned here, and we hope that you find good food in town.

(I). Hotels/ Guest Houses

Hotel/guest house rates vary depending on the time of the year. A large number of guest houses remain empty during the winter months of December, January, and February. Not many tourists stay around for the monsoon months of July, August, and September too. So in effect, guest

houses make most of their income in the spring/summer months of March, April, May, and June, and the fall months of October and November. Hotels in the tourist seasons in the spring and fall cost 6000 rupees and beyond for a month. The hotel rooms are generally smallish, with a kitchenette and a bathroom. If you intend to make some of your meals yourself, either the hotel might be able to provide you with a cooking stove and gas cylinder, or you can buy a small portable gas cylinder with an attached burner on the top, which is available at a shop in lower-Dharamsala.

Hot water should be available from a 'gyeser' in the bathroom or solar panels on the roof top. There are some good hotels close to Tibet Charity, but volunteers couldn't put up with dogs barking at night. There are many non-stray dogs near Tibet Charity. The Yongling School area has many hotels, some of which charge around 500 rupees a night. You can get a decent room for 6000 or 7000 rupees a month. We may be able to book a room for you. It is generally better to get a room of your choice once you come to Dharamsala. There are so many hotels and quest houses, and it makes it impractical to list their names. Most of the hotels are comparable in quality. The rooms are very basic, and most of them have cable television.

We wish you a safe trip to Dharamsala. Thank You.